

MARKETS OF HALFSHIRE HUNDRED, WORCESTERSHIRE

Introduction

Members of the Hagley Historical & Field Society have looked at six markets in an area that was mainly Worcestershire until 1974 from both an historical angle and also from a landscape archaeologist's view.

Perhaps a few definitions would help to clarify the reader's understanding of the subject or at least see where the various contributors are coming from.

A market is a gathering of people for the purchase and sale of provisions and livestock. It can also be the place where this activity takes place, although the word is often a prefix followed by place, square or hall.

Markets and fairs carried out the same functions but usually the former were held on a weekly basis, while fairs were often annual events associated with a Saints Day.

Authority to hold either event was vested with the King in the case of boroughs but villages could hold fairs with blessing of the local lord.

The granting of borough status to a place usually meant that the men of the town became self-governing citizens responsible to the grantor but with their rights fully set out. With this status the right to hold a market and fairs was normal.

In an existing town it could be necessary to find a new location for the market but in other circumstances the burghers' houses and their burgage plots would be set out at right angles to the frontages which would collectively be laid out around a square, triangle or even a barrel shaped "market square".

Smaller places might use an existing village green. In many places a market cross would be found. This feature is thought to be the place where deals were made in front of the Almighty and therefore non-negotiable.

It appears that many markets had a market hall. Often this provided an open space on the ground floor for a number of stallholders and a comfortable space on the first floor for a variety of meetings including law courts and the town council.

The following part lays out the known facts about each of the markets in the six towns and the final part will attempt to see if there are any common factors in Halfshire Hundred.

Six Market Sites:

Bewdley by Pat Dunn

Historical Information

The location of Bewdley situated in the Severn Valley at the head of the tidal waters made it a shipping port in medieval times for a huge area from Bristol and Gloucester to the Midlands and the North.

From the earliest times the ford at Lax Lane (Lax means salmon) was the crossing point for travellers and traders travelling to the Welsh Marches and Wales itself and for the local fishermen tending their nets. The adjacent Wyre Forest provided a plentiful supply of oak: for boat building, especially for the hefty local trading vessels called trows, and other woods for a variety of industries.

From the river the ground rose fairly rapidly to the hill above which was of strategic importance from prehistoric times commanding, as it did, views across the river and movement on it. It was on this hill that the Mortimers, later Earls of March, built a hunting lodge in the early 13th century, and over time as family members married into Royalty and one of them became Edward IV and the lodge became Tickenhill Palace. He set up the Council of the Marches to administer that part of the kingdom and the Palace was used as the base for the Council.

The area closest to the Palace, that is Wyre Hill, is shown by the large number of burgage plots still identifiable on the 1884 O.S. map. Burgage plots usually suggest the presence of a market. Other plots can be identified in Wribbenhall, Lax Lane and Load Lane.

The first reference to a market appears in 1272 when Edward I granted to Henry of Ribbesford, Roger Mortimer's steward, a weekly Wednesday market and a fair on St Margaret's (June 21st). The market could have been on Wyre Hill but there is no definite proof although the sixty one burgage plots recorded in 1308 suggest this to be the most likely site. According to Burton, writing in 1883, tradition had it that the original Town Hall was situated here and that an old inn, The Shoulder of

Mutton, was known in his day as "the old town hall". He wrote that it had "until recent times a projecting storey with pillars under which was a covered market".

Wyre Hill was a drovers road and for that reason was wider than most. Examination of a painting by S.Hill of the Old Town Hall in 1830 shows that the road balloons out giving space for more market stalls.

The building still stands (2007) but has been heavily altered through the centuries and from a Department of the Environment Listing it apparently dates from the second half of the 15th century. This does not rule out the possibility that an earlier building was on the same site.

The next reference appears in June 1375 when Philippa, Countess of March and widow of Edmund Mortimer was granted by Edward III a Wednesday market and two 3-day fairs annually on July 7th and November 6th. As her father was Lionel, Duke of Clarence, presumably she would have found it easy to extract Royal favours. Historians seem to be divided on whether her market was on the old site or whether it had moved nearer the river, but it would make more sense for a move to be made when the new bridge was complete.

In 1381, a year before Philippa died and six years after the launch of her market, profits from the ferry rose from ten shillings p.a. in 1336 to £2 and by 1424 they had virtually doubled. After a period of time the market lapsed and in 1442 Richard, Duke of York who lived at Tickenhill, obtained a grant from Henry VI for another one on a Wednesday and a fair on February 5th, the Feast of St Agatha. Richard took a great interest in the town and was the inspiration behind the building of the first bridge in 1447, which would prove of great benefit to those using the market. There is no documentary evidence to prove that the market was moved to Load Street in 1447 but the street name was in use in 1472, and Leland confirms the position on his visit c.1530.

Richard's son Edward IV became Bewdley's Lord of the Manor and granted it a Charter of Incorporation in 1472 and although it fails to mention a market (perhaps it was assumed that the previous one would continue) he bestowed great privileges on the town, making it virtually a self-governing oligarchy through a bailiff and burgesses endowed with great power. The Yorkist Rose, together with Edward's own badge of a horse's fetterlock, became the civic coat of arms which also included the anchor, acknowledging the importance of the river trade as well as a sword, perhaps noting the town's loyalty in the Wars of the Roses. Such Royal patronage would certainly increase the town's prosperity and self-esteem on which the Tudors built.

In 1507 Henry VII granted a Saturday market and three annual fairs on the Feasts of St George (April 23rd), St Anne (July 26th) and St Andrew (November 30th). When Henry VIII became king he confirmed the privileges granted by his father.

By Tudor times the market site in Load Street had a wide triangular area (the site of St Anne's church) with the rest of the wide road down towards the river and planned burgage plots on both sides. Ease of access to the river benefited trade with all parts of the town. Leland wrote of a timber built chapel of ease and of three streets one being the market place. The latter is large and well "*buildd*". Other new buildings were also commented on favourably.

On September 12th 1606 James I granted a new charter - a massive document-in which he confirmed to the burgesses a Saturday market and three fairs granted by Henry VII as well as an extra market each Wednesday and an additional fair on St Agatha's Day -indicating that Richard's bequest had lapsed. The St George's Fair was for horned cattle, horses, cheese, linen and woollen cloth while St Anne's was a cherry fair. He also granted the right to Court Leet and a Court of Pie Powder. The bailiff and burgesses were entitled to the tolls from both markets and fairs, and the bridge wardens or bellmen collected these. The bailiff as Clerk of the Market had the right to spend the tolls as he felt fit (presumably after consulting the

burgesses) and if anyone brought any charge against him or his toll collectors the costs were to be borne by the borough. In 1639 he had at his disposal, the rents of 16 houses as well as the income from the markets and fairs.

James I also granted the corporation i.e. the bailiff and burgesses the right to a Court Leet and a Court of Pie Powder.

Details of some payments include rents not only from the market stalls but also from standings elsewhere, e.g. from weavers in the shop under the chapel, a salt woman, a pedlar selling his wares under the conduit, and traders selling their goods under the "King's Board"! The tolls from the bridge also went to the Corporation.

It wasn't all take. In 1621 the bailiff and burgesses granted "*fourtie shillings to the schole master for ever*". In 1632 a Mr Whittcoat gave the town a new butter cross and the burgesses "*pd for ale for them wch removed the butter cross.... 00.02. 04*". They also gave 40s to the poor twice a year, on the Feast of St John in June and on Christmas Day.

Attempts were made to nullify James's Charter but William III restored it but Queen Anne confirmed it in 1708. Over the years both town and market prospered and the large number of inns that were opened was an attempt to satisfy the needs of the buyers and sellers at the market. The river trade and industries thrived in what is dubbed Bewdley's Golden Age but great changes were taking place with the escalation of the Industrial Revolution particularly with regard to transport.

James Brindley's canal at Stourport, opened in 1770, decimated Bewdley's river trade and the turnpike to Tenbury and Ludlow (both of which also had markets) had a devastating effect on Bewdley.

The superior macadamised surface of the turnpikes was able to support wagons with heavy wheels and massive loads, which meant lower costs and quicker delivery times compared with packhorses. Bewdley's roads were composed of sand, gravel, pebbles and stones until Load Street was tarmacked between January and March 1882 at a cost of £244.2.6 after which other streets followed. However it was all too late to

rejuvenate the ailing market.

By 1783 the shambles, stalls and standings were dilapidated and by 1792 the weekly market and St Agatha's Fair had disappeared so they were demolished and new ones provided behind the Guildhall built through the efforts of Peter Prattinton in 1808. There were thirty-two butcher's shambles at first, but Burton in his book on Bewdley was lamenting that there were only two in 1883, the rest, or at least some, were taken over for a general market. He also records that in 1835 market tolls were valued at £42 p.a. and the rents in the butcher's shambles £30.13.0 but in 1883 tolls amounted to only £15.2.0

In 1871 Mr George Griffith wrote to the local paper, *The Kidderminster Shuttle*, complaining that turnpike gates erected at the east end of the bridge, Dowles road, Red Hill and Welch Gate had the effect of lessening trade as they "interfered with the free movement of citizens be it for pleasure or trade". It has also been suggested that with the improvement of Load Street in 1882 some stallholders opened little shops on either side of it, which would catch people's eye more readily. In 1914 it was suggested that a market was still held on a Saturday but for whatever reasons the market had certainly disappeared by the end of the First World War in 1918 as had the Fairs. The shambles then became a storage space for the Borough Engineer's Department.

In recent years an open-air market was tucked away adjacent to the back of the George Hotel but there does not seem to be any written record for an exact date. Perhaps this was because some records were mislaid when Bewdley became part of Wyre Forest District in 1974. However it closed in 2006 but found a temporary site on Severnside South while attempts were made to give it a permanent home.

Meanwhile the shambles behind the guildhall has become the town's museum, now possibly its finest asset, together with the other tourist attraction the Severn Valley Railway, the Phoenix rising from the ashes of the GWR line opened in 1853 in a failed attempt to restore Bewdley's prosperity. Closed in the 1960s by Dr Beeching, it is now a very successful volunteer organization.

In August 2007 the Saturday market re-opened on its previous site close to the George Hotel, and it is hoped that visitors to the railway and the museum will support it and maintain a 700-year tradition.

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Six Market Sites:

Bromsgrove by Robert Deeley and Bill Riley

Historical information

The market at Bromsgrove dates back to at least King John's charter of 1199, in which he granted the town a market on Tuesdays, and also two fairs to be held on the 24th June to celebrate the festival of St. John the Baptist and another on 1st October. The market included the buying and selling of livestock, as well as linen and woollen cloths, raw wool, cheese and peddlers with small items.

In 1317 John Mortimer had the Tuesday market confirmed by King Edward II.

By 1468 the day had changed to Thursdays but by 1792 it had reverted to Tuesdays.

The market was situated at the junction of the High Street, Worcester Street and St. John's Street.

Map evidence

The earliest detailed survey of Bromsgrove is the Tithe map showing some infilling of medieval

burgage plots behind the High Street.

A book by Alan Richards and Norman Neasom - "The Bromsgrove Time Machine" shows Bromsgrove as it was in the 1850s including the burgage plots of about this time.

Buildings

The Town Hall or Market House was first built in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I and must have looked very much like the one existing at Ledbury. Built on oaken pillars the open space on the ground floor was used by stallholders. The first floor would have been used for courts and other public meetings. On a cobbled square at the back stood the market cross.

Responsibility for keeping the market house clean in 1573 was assigned to the Town Crier.

By 1832 this building was dangerous and was demolished. A brick town hall replaced it and in turn it was pulled down in 1928.

Bromsgrove 1882-1886

Showing locations of High Street, Market Street and Market Place



High Street looking south west towards the Market Place. This is the site of modern markets and is the route of the Roman road, the A38 from Worcester and Droitwich.



In "Bromsgrove Now and Then" by Alan and Sheila Richards (1988), it states that one of the best places to recapture the atmosphere of the old market is in the modern Market Hall built in 1994, where fresh produce is sold three times a week.

The first covered market was built in 1926 on the site of an open one dating from at least 1832.

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Market Street in Bromsgrove looking towards St John's Church. This was a minor road until the second half of the twentieth century, when it became a by-pass. At the same time High Street was pedestrianised.

Photograph by Tom Pagett



This view is looking up Church Street from Market Street to High Street.

Photograph by Tom Pagett

Photograph on previous page by Tom Pagett

Six Market Sites:

Dudley by Sheila Pearson

Historical Information

The first known market in Dudley was in the time of Roger de Somery II (1235- 1272), 10th Baron of Dudley. This market and a fair were set up in 1247. About the same time his first wife, as part of her dowry, brought Chipping Campden into the fold; Clent was also given a fair in 1253 and on his aunt's death in 1268 the market and an eight day fair at Newport Pagnell passed to de Somery. Because de Somery was tenant-in-chief of lands not only in the Dudley area but also in Buckinghamshire he had a prime call on lands previously held by his forebears.

On his death the Inquisition Post Mortem indicated that the market was thriving, and on his son's death in 1291 the records show that the value of the market was even better.

By 1541 Dudley was becoming a commercial centre. There were incoming drapers and haberdashers, especially from Coventry, e.g. William Haddone and Anthony Harrison who in 1533 leased Juke's tenements. In 1539 Richard Harrison was well known as a woollen draper. These trades came because of the well-established market and the absence of Guild Restrictions. Nail making also played an important part for people such as Rannolde Warde, who supplied 133,000 nails of nine different sizes and types in 1538 for Henry VIII's palace of Nonsuch.

The main street of Dudley at this time stretched from the foot of the castle to St. Thomas's church, incorporating a market place with offshoots in Hall Street, Stone and Hampton Lane.

The 17th century historian Thomas Habington in his survey of Worcestershire mentions two churches; St. Thomas and St. Edmund's and says that Dudley with its Saturday Market and its Fair was a bustling country market town.

Plague in the early 17th century caused a petition to the Quarter Sessions in Worcester for the "*poore distressed towne of Dudley*" where the people are destitute and nearly 150 children had

been orphaned.

The Civil War brought further disruption to trade and damage to St. Edmund's Church. After the war a variety of records (Hearth Tax assessments and probate inventories) show an increase in the size of houses and wealth of possessions. This rise in prosperity led to changes in the market place. In 1646 with the demolition of St. Edmund's went a "*ruinous messuage tenement adjoining the street from the Castle of Dudley to the High Crosse in the market place*".

In 1653 money, totalling £36. 3s. 5d, was collected for the building of a market hall. This followed the traditional pattern of a market with open arches and a town hall above. Dudley's market hall was crowned with a clock tower and a cupola. The upper room served as a meeting place for the Court Leet and the Court Baron. Richard Foley's will of 1657 mentions certain buildings near the "horse fair".

In the 19th century the Local Town Improvement Act administered by the townsmen was acted upon. Improvements were made in the Market Place by buying up and removing the old Middle Row of buildings. These were mainly tenements but some were shops. Mr Ralph Musselwhite, a draper, had demanded £4,800 for his shop and house. In 1846 he took his case to a Jury at Worcester Sessions who awarded him a sum of £3,440.

On November 29th 1847 a Public Meeting was held to discuss changing the dates of the fairs in the town and to consider having an extra fair. The outcome was a new Cattle Fair to be held on the first Monday in March annually. The usual May, August and October Fairs were rescheduled on the first Monday of the respective months. In March 1848 the Commissioners purchased the Jolly Colliers Inn and three other houses on the Market flat, the property of Mr Homer of Kateshill for £2,800.

Later in 1848 Asiatic Flu hit Dudley and with it a loss of trade plus the failure of the corn millers in

the town. Seventeen shops along the main street were "to let". While the cholera was still raging the Commissioners bought the last lot of buildings in the middle of the market place, including the draper's shop of Mr Robert Houghton for £1,860. In February 1851 the cleared market ground was paved with new stones. In April 1852 a cab rank was established by Mr William Beddard of the Castle Hotel, "a long awaited convenience".

In 1858 there were moves to change the appearance of the market place even further. Mr C.F.G. Clark sent a letter to the Editor of the Dudley Times and Express advocating the demolition of the 100 year old Town Hall. *"Standing as a head and foot of two narrow streets called Queen St. and High St. it necessarily made a finish to that block of buildings then existing, known as the Middle Row".* As the Middle Row was deemed an *"encumberer of the ground"* it was demolished *"to secure our fine open market place (save the neck end of it) as a suitable place in which people may congregate and the trader expose his warse"*. He argued that since Lord Ward had erected at his own expense a

new Town Hall for Magisterial and other public purposes he would have no objection to the proposal. Also the Board of Governors, who used the rooms, were moving to new and more suitable Board Rooms in the new Union Workhouse. He then refers to the old Town Hall, as *"an acknowledged nuisance as a public urinal, its shameful use as a hiding place for juvenile obscenity and adult immorality and its general in utility all demand its speedy removal"*. It was two years later in June 1860 that the old Town Hall was pulled down and the Earl of Dudley signified his intention of erecting a handsome Italian fountain on the site, which was duly completed.

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Dudley town centre in 1825

Six Market Sites:

Hales Owen by Tom Pagett

Historical information

Hales Owen was well established when the Domesday survey was carried out in 1086. The abbey was developed following a grant of land by King John in 1215 to Peter de Rupibus, Bishop of Winchester for the purpose of building a monastery.

In about 1270 the charter was reviewed and the borough status was agreed to be in line with that of Hereford. Burgesses were to pay 12d per annum for each burgage plot and also enjoy common pasture throughout Hales Owen.

A further review was made in 1609 at the request of Meriel Lyttelton, whose family owned the manor by now. This confirmed the market would be held every Monday and that a fair was to be on St. Barnabas day (11th June) and the three following days.

William Harris (1831) refers to a market house with a first floor room for public business and a prison attached. The site is thought to be at the top of Peckingham Street, a little way into Little Cornbow and facing Great Cornbow.

Map evidence

A map of Hales Owen copied by the council from the 1881 Ordnance Survey shows Hagley Street with Great Cornbow, Little Cornbow and Peckingham Streets running eastward with the remnants of burgage plots running back from these streets thus forming the market area.

Assuming that infilling took place at some unknown dates and that the short road called the Bull Ring resulted from this infilling and that Birmingham Street was made on a burgage plot then we have the present outline of the market site with an approximate area of 0.73ha or 1.6acres.

Buildings and other structures

Many of the buildings facing the market up to the mid-20th century have now been lost to so-called improvements, but there are enough left to identify the original building line of the 13th

century.

The following are examples. Hagley Street no's 20-23, Great Cornbow no's 16,24- 27, and Peckingham Street no's 9-11. Sketches and supporting data by Bill Hazelhurst and Julian Hunt support these ideas. From earliest times development has been piecemeal and therefore the building lines have not moved a great deal in 800 years.

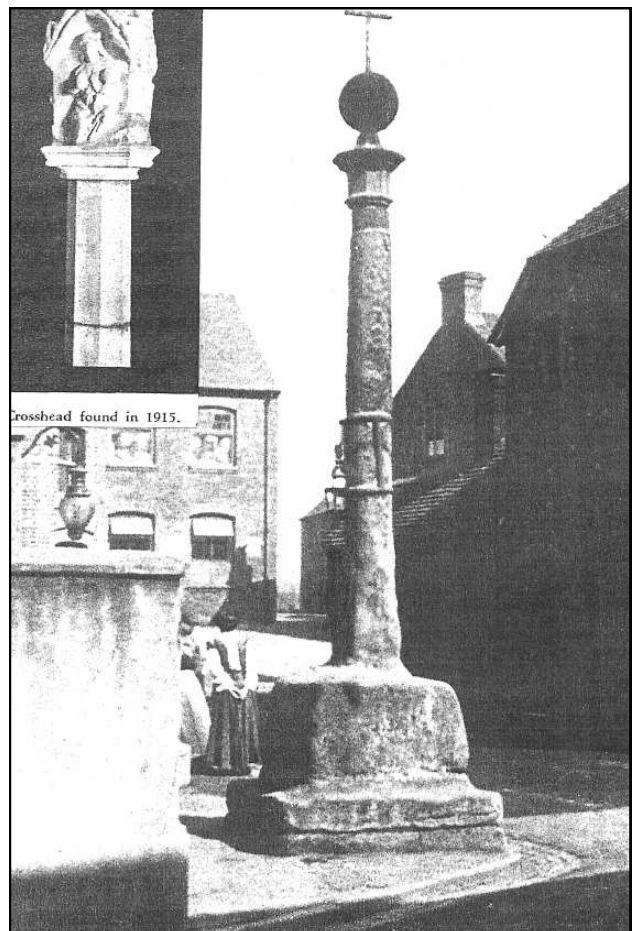
The old market cross, now in the churchyard, originally stood in the Bullring. The present bridge at the lower end of the market is probably about 100 years old but it could well have been refurbished on top of a much older structure.

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Market Cross in Cornbow c1890



This view depicts No 24 and part of No 25 Great Cornbow in Halesowen

Photograph by Tom Pagett



Shown here is the Halesowen Institute at 16 Great Cornbow, Halesowen

Photograph by Tom Pagett



In this photograph Nos 9-11 Peckingham Street can be seen.

Photograph by Tom Pagett

Six Market Sites:

Kidderminster by Bill Riley

Historical information

"Kidour-Mynstre, a good Market Towne. The River Stoure runnethe throughe the myddle of it, and at Rages drownethe a Pece of it."

So wrote John Leland c1589, by which time the town market had been established for three hundred years or more, although the exact date of its foundation is uncertain. In 1228 a fair was granted but a market probably already existed and it was certainly established by 1240. In 1266 Thomas de Punchampton is recorded as having murdered Gilbert Athelard after an argument there.

Medieval Kidderminster was situated near the River Stour and was composed of a small number of streets clustered round the Bull Ring. From the town major roads led across the river into Wales, eastward towards Coventry and Oxford and southward to Worcester.

The market would have encompassed most of the streets and its boundary was marked out by Worcester Cross, Pound Cross and barriers in Church Street and Dakebrook (Daddlebrook). Its centre was the High Street with Coventry Street, Worcester Street, Vicar Street and The Bull Ring/ Church Street at the four corners. There is evidence of burgage plots along all these thoroughfares - indicative of a market presence, as they would have belonged to the burgesses who governed the town.

Stalls would have been set up in front of their houses on market days. Outsiders could hire standings on payment of one penny to the Lords, who were for many years descendants of Manasser Bliset, steward to Henry II who had purchased it from his master for £20 c1160. In addition a halfpenny went to the Low Bailiff who oversaw the market.

In the heart of the market stood the Market Cross, which Leland described as *"a pretty cross in the market place, having six pillars and arches of stone with a seventh pillar in the middle bearing up the*

fornix (i.e, a vault or arch)". The cross survived until 1760 when it was demolished to make way for the Guildhall, which replaced the Town Hall on the lower end of the line of stalls, which ran down the High Street.

Control of the market by the Bailiff and the Burgesses was strict. Payment of tolls was carefully monitored e.g. a man could fish freely in the Stour but if he sold his catch at the market he had to pay a toll. Tolls listed in 1333 included four pence for a horse (two pence each from the vendor and the purchaser), cattle and pigs were slightly cheaper and cartloads of fish and corn were two pence. If the purchaser was a Kidderminster man his payment was waived. The Bailiff (elected by the twenty four burgesses) appointed two Catchpolls who were paid a fee if they caught anyone avoiding payment. The miscreant would have to pay 60 shillings to the burgesses and a purse to the Lord.

Butchers who offered 'messled brawne' or 'leprous' meat for sale had to cover them with a salted cloth as a sign of their poor quality otherwise the Catchpoll could seize them and the Bailiff would give them to the poor. No one could come early to market to buy up goods and 'make a ring', for trading was not allowed until a bell was rung.

On market and fair days the Bailiff, three Burgesses and the Catchpolls patrolled the town *'to see that peace was kept in good order'*.

After the demolition of the market cross in 1760 the Guildhall was built at the lower end of the High Street on the site of the old Town Hall. It comprised of a room for the parish constables on the ground floor, with a council chamber and courtroom above. Pigeons were kept in the roof space and prisoners in a basement gaol. Passers by were able to view the prisoners through gratings in the pavement. The building was demolished in 1878 for safety reasons.

The market stalls were replaced by an indoor retail market in 1822 with entrances from the High

In 1978 the whole area was bulldozed the entrance which was a Grade II listed building to make way for the Rowland Hill Shopping Centre. The market then found temporary accommodation in the old Woodward Grosvenor Carpet Company offices on Worcester Cross,

The new market operates on Thursdays and Saturdays.

In 1871 a cattle market was built in Market Street



to replace the haphazard livestock sales in Mill Street, High Street, Worcester Street and the Horsefair. This purpose-built Victorian market occupied the area now covered by the college car park. However the manager's unusual house survives, currently occupied by the R.A.F.A. Also still in place is one of the original gateposts bearing the borough coat of arms. When it closed in 1995 the business moved to Comberton Hill. However the livestock sales were short-lived and it survives as a Saturday Plant Market and also as a venue for weekly furniture and carpet auctions.

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Kidderminster High Street. The Nat West bank is where the retail market was located.

Photograph by Bill Riley



Kidderminster High Street, looking up towards Worcester Street and showing the Nat West Bank, the site of the old retail market.

Photograph by Bill Riley



At the bottom of Vicar Street stands the Swan pub and at the rear was the exit from the retail market, where now is the Rowland Hill Centre service area.
Photograph by Bill Riley



At the bottom of Vicar Street is located the Town Hall and where opposite was the rear entrance to the retail market.
Photograph by Bill Riley

Six Market Sites: Stourbridge by Edgar Smith

Historical information

The area where the bridge over the river Stour is, was known as Bedcote in around 650 and along with other hamlets came within the manor of Oldswinford.

In 1481 Edward IV gave Oldswinford to the Dean and Chapter of Windsor. A year later they were granted a royal charter and the right to hold a market on Fridays, plus fairs on Edward the Confessor's feast day (March 18th) and another on St. Augustine's day (August 28th).

The lord of the manor kept the market tolls and formulated the trading rules. The Court of Pie Powder settled disputes. Pie Powder comes from Norman French, pieds (feet) and poudres (dusty).

In 1485 the manor was returned to the Ormond family, and Henry VII renewed the charter.

A market hall was built about this time, standing at the crossroads near the present day town clock. It stood on six pillars in the centre of the road leaving little space for either traffic or market stalls, except for those under the hall. The first floor was used for meetings and storage. There is also a reference to a felon being led down six stone steps to one of two dungeons. In 1773 the old hall was demolished and replaced in by one designed by John White and opened on 27th October 1827. It was modelled on Islington Market in Liverpool.

Covered stalls filled the sides of the rectangular shaped building. The previous one was triangular presumably filling the available space.

Alongside the market hall a corn exchange was built in Market Street in 1850. This was used as the town's centre for meetings and concerts



*The surviving classical facade of Stourbridge Market Hall. The Market Hall was built in 1827 and demolished during the 1980s. The clock was erected in 1857 and electrified in 1972.
Photograph by Edgar Smith*

until the present Town Hall was built in 1887.

The dates of the fairs changed over time and by 1792 they were held on the 29th March and the 8th September. From 1888 there was only one fair, which was held on the last Monday in March and was a horse fair on an area known as Smithfield.

Map evidence

A map based on the tithe survey of 1837 shows the market hall and the cattle market lying in the angle formed by Crown Lane and Market Street. The bulge in Lower High Street suggests that early street markets and fairs may have been held there.

Buildings

The modern Crown Centre and the Town Hall indicate the sites of buildings formerly linked to market activities.

It is suggested that building lines throughout the centre of Stourbridge follow those in use in medieval times.

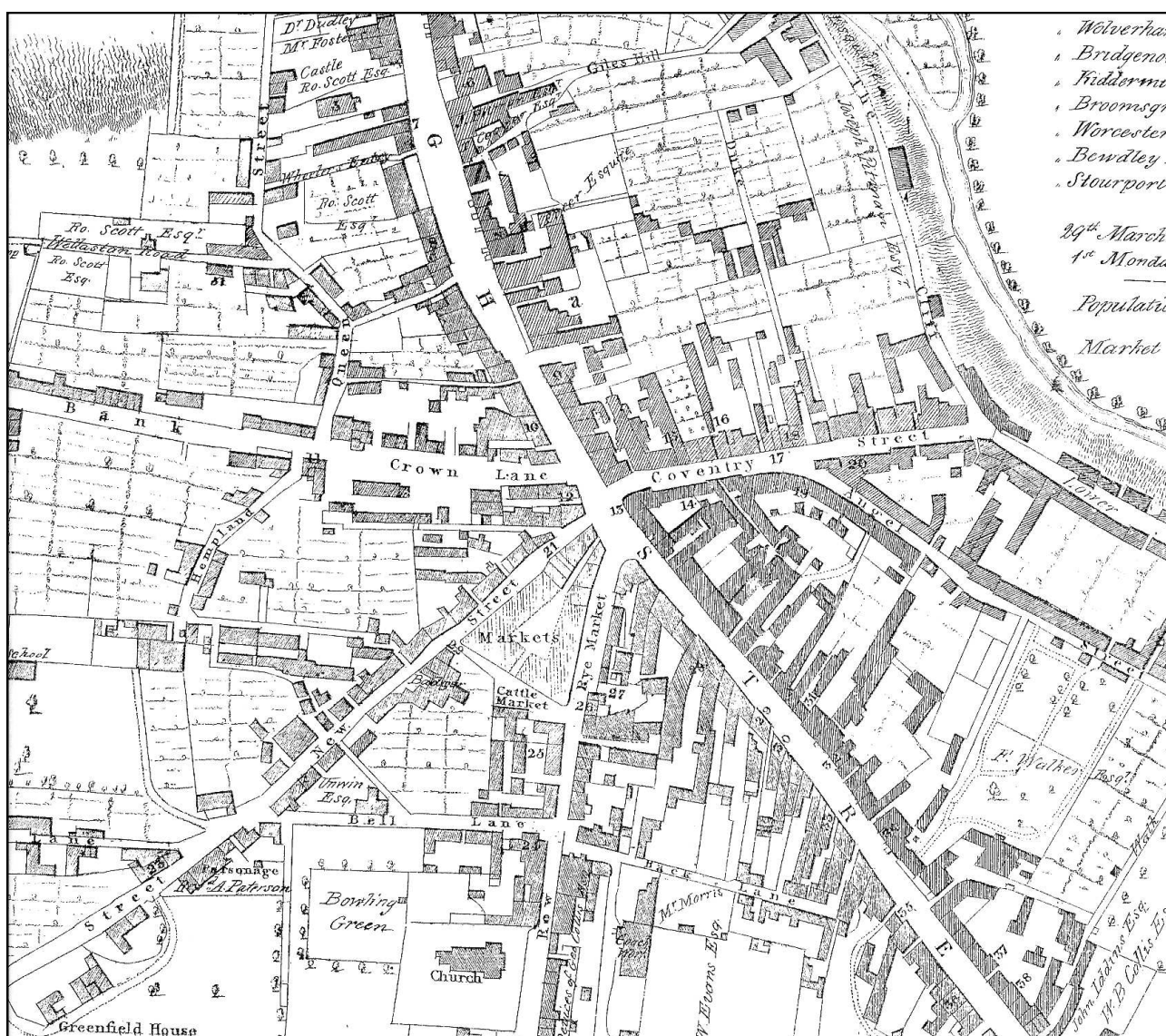
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Stourbridge in 1837

Conclusions

Consideration of the six market towns examined by the members of Hagley Historical & Field Society has led to the identification of a number of common factors, which is not surprising but it does ensure that any further work undertaken would have a check list of the points raised collectively as minima.

The common features are:

- The early medieval start dates.
- Borough status that includes the right to hold markets and fairs.
- Apparent continuity of Royal authority until modern times.
- The market sites were contained by the houses of burgesses with the burgage plots at right angles to the perimeter of the market. The shape could be rectangular, triangular or barrel-shaped. Geography probably had some bearing on this.
- Sites could and did move e.g. Bewdley was influenced by its bridge and river trade.
- Structures included market crosses and market halls. The latter were open on the ground floor for stallholders with a room above for a range of civic gatherings.
- Horse fairs and other animal markets were usually on a separate site from the weekly markets, which dealt mainly with domestic goods.
- Bullrings appear on maps occasionally. Bull baiting springs to mind but as records on this subject are few, it perhaps as well to keep an open mind.

This project has been a useful exercise in mental demolition work. Market sites tend to get in-filled over time and in turn in-filling is cleared away. To understand how the urban landscape has changed over the best part of a millennium has been an interesting challenge and we hope that others may look at their own local site with a fresh point of view.